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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S OCTOBER 29 MEETING WITH FORMER
PRESIDENT CESAR GAVIRIA

Classified By: Ambassador William R. Brownfield.

Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶11. (C) The Ambassador reviewed with Liberal Party leader Cesar Gaviria on October 29 the result of the preceding day's local elections, Senator Cordoba's and President Chavez' efforts to promote a humanitarian accord, and prospects for U.S. Congressional approval of the bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA). Gaviria judged that the liberal remained Colombia's single biggest party, though President Uribe's coalition did well. Gaviria said politicians tied to the former paramilitaries lost ground in the elections. The former president expressed skepticism about Senator Cordoba's and President Chavez' efforts to promote a humanitarian accord. Gaviria called President Uribe's acceptance of Chavez as a facilitator in humanitarian exchange talks with the FARC a "mistake." Gaviria said that the U.S. Congress' failure to approve the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) would prove devastating for Colombia. He voiced interest in meeting with U.S. legislators to urge them to support the FTA. END
SUMMARY.

¶12. (U) The Ambassador paid a courtesy call on October 29 to former president, former OAS Secretary General, and current Liberal Party leader Cesar Gaviria. Polcouns participated as notetaker.

OCTOBER LOCAL ELECTIONS

¶13. (C) Gaviria said that no party did especially well in the elections. The Polo Democratico won the Bogota mayor's race, but fared poorly in the rest of the country. The Liberals won six governorships, down from 13 in 2003, but continue to function as Colombia's biggest political party. The Uribista coalition parties won a majority of governorships, but the coalition remains divided and lacking in ideological coherence. He said that the Liberal Party would support initiatives to raise the minimum number of votes required to gain representation in congress--a move that would harm smaller parties and benefit the Liberals. Gaviria added that despite the support of some Liberal Party leaders such as Senator Piedad Cordoba for the Polo's mayoral candidate, the Party would remain united. "Piedad always has to be different," Gaviria said.

¶ 4. (C) When asked about the parapolitical scandal's impact on the elections, Gaviria replied that the results showed that politicians linked to para-politicians had lost ground. With the paramilitary demobilization, para-politicians lost their capacity to intimidate voters or opposition candidates. On Colombia's Caribbean coast, the traditional political bosses also saw a substantial weakening in their hold on voters. As a result, independent candidates in Cartagena, Santa Marta and the departments of Cesar and Atlantico scored victories. Still, he noted that parapoliticians retained control over the government machinery in some areas such as Sucre and Magdalena departments, making it hard to challenge their power.

HUMANITARIAN INITIATIVE

¶ 5. (C) Gaviria voiced skepticism about the efforts of Cordoba and President Chavez to promote a humanitarian accord with the FARC. He did not understand why Uribe allowed Chavez to play such a role, and deemed it a mistake. Chavez' involvement complicated Colombia's relations with a key economic partner, as well as talks to resolve the Colombia-Venezuela border dispute. Gaviria also disagreed with Uribe's decision to release unilaterally senior FARC official Rodrigo Granda, as well as 150 other FARC prisoners, from prison as a goodwill gesture. The FARC only respects gains won through negotiations; it does not respond to good faith acts. Still, he questioned Uribe's refusal to consider a demilitarized zone to start talks. A demilitarized zone subject to strict time and geographic limits would be preferable to a FARC official meeting with Chavez in Miraflores, Gaviria contended.

FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

¶ 6. (C) The Ambassador said that the U.S. Congress appeared unlikely to vote on the Colombia FTA this year, but predicted a window of opportunity to get the accord approved in early ¶ 2008. Gaviria said U.S. failure to approve the FTA--especially if coupled with congressional approval of the deal with Peru--would devastate Colombia. It would be all right if Congress did not approve any of the three pending Latin America FTAs. It would be a disaster if they approved Peru and/or Panama, but not Colombia. The country would appear isolated in Latin America. He further stated that he would meet with U.S. legislators to urge them to pass the FTA, but only if it appears the vote will take place.

UN AND OAS ROLES IN COLOMBIA

¶ 7. (C) Gaviria said the Organization of American States Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia (MAPP/OAS) has played an important role in the success of the paramilitary peace process. Most Colombians would welcome similar OAS participation in an eventual FARC or National Liberation Army (ELN) process. He thinks highly of OAS Secretary General Insulza, and believes he could contribute

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to peace efforts in the country. Gaviria said the GOC would also likely accept UN involvement in an ELN or FARC process, but cautioned that this would involve more complications. Many Colombians resent the "colonial" attitude shown by many UN officials towards Colombia in the past, and would want to impose strict controls on any UN role.
Brownfield